

House Committee Hearing

March 9, 2007

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee my name is Connie Ewing O'Connor, from Poplar, Montana. I have been designated as the Ewing family representative. I am here today to request your support of Senate Bill 29 – Establishing the Robert E. Ewing Jr. Memorial Highway. At this point I would like to acknowledge the family members who are present here today: my mother Mildred Ewing from Helena and my sister Lela Cross from Seattle, WA.

Robert E. Ewing Jr., known to everyone as Bob, was an exceptional individual who dedicated his entire life's work to building the highway system in Montana. He worked for the Montana Highway Department for nearly 50 years. He was a man of great personal and professional integrity. He was a man I was proud to call my father and my friend.

During the summer of 1947 the Department was building a piece of road in the Big Horn Valley. Bob was introduced to the Department when Dick Larson knocked on the door and asked him to go to work. On June 3rd, 1947 Bob was hired by the Montana Highway Department. During the next several years he made a rapid rise through the ranks. Moving quickly from a Gravel Inspector in 1947 to a Chainman, a Rodman, an Instrument Man, and to an Acting Project Engineer in 1955. He became a permanent Project Engineer in 1956, a job he truly loved.

Initial project assignments were modest in size and included turning two-wheel track roads into graveled grades. Project assignments grew in size and complexity over time. Eventually Bob was responsible for multi-million dollar interstate construction projects.

Bob was the "Resident Engineer" on two inter-state highway projects that won construction awards. His project on Interstate 94 Huntley – Ballantine east of Billings was awarded third place in 1970. His project on Interstate 90 Columbus – Park City was awarded first place in 1971.

Bob and his crew performed the location and field survey work on a section of US 212 near Lame Deer in 1975 that won 3rd place in FHWA's annual award competition in the category "Outstanding Section of New Highway in its Rural Environment." There were 379 entries from 45 states in the contest. He received a letter of congratulations for his contributions to that project.

In 1976 Bob accepted the position as a "Statewide Construction Reviewer." As a Construction Reviewer his ability to influence the quality of highway construction was expanded. He was able to assist with behind the scene improvements though his ability to discern potential and real construction problems. He was diligent in seeking solutions and was always willing to share both his knowledge and experience. He developed many of the manuals used today by the field inspectors. He enjoyed his work and was well regarded by his supervisors, fellow workers, and by the contractors.

Bob retired in 1990 but continued to work for the MDT on a part time basis until the final challenge in his life overtook him. He passed away on February 25th, 1997 after a struggle with lung cancer.

Bob's accomplishments are impressive enough that most engineers would consider his career a success. His accomplishments are, I believe, even more impressive when you consider that Bob came from humble beginnings. He was the son of a homestead farmer in the Bighorn Valley. He rose thru the ranks of the Highway department without the benefit of a college education. His lack of formal education was more than offset by his love of his craft, his willingness to go the extra mile to make sure the job was done right, a work ethic second to none, and a lifetime of dedication to the DOT and the State of Montana.

Bob was a dedicated family man. He was a loving husband and a caring father. He married our mother on September 3rd, 1950. A marriage that lasted 47 years through the good times and some that were challenging. Bob had a wide variety of project assignments that took him many places across Montana. He believed it was important to have his family with him. He moved his family 37 times though out his nearly 50 years with the Department. Bob had four children, arguably with a little help from our mother. All of his children graduated from college; an accomplishment that both my mother and father can take a full measure of credit for encouraging. Bob's children grew up in home where giving up was not an option, failing was not an option, and doing anything less than you were able to was not acceptable. Bob cared for and supported his mother after his father had passed away. He offered to raise his brother's three children after his brother's untimely death.

Bob was not a flashy guy. Truth be known, I believe he would be more than a little uncomfortable with all of the attention that is being paid to his career and life here today. Bob was a man who deserves to be honored for all of the reasons presented here today and for countless others that will go unmentioned. Bob Ewing was as fine of an example of a public servant as anyone will ever find. Bob Ewing was as fine of an example of a Montanan as anyone will ever find. This committee has the opportunity to honor one of its own. I respectfully request this committee support Senate Bill 29 establishing the Robert E. Ewing Jr. Memorial Highway. No greater honor could be offered to a man so dedicated to building the highway system in Montana.

I would like to close our presentation by thanking the members of this Committee for granting us an opportunity to come here today and present this request.

Good Day and God Bless.

A Resolution of the Montana Transportation Commission Designating the portion of Interstate Highway 90 from Park City to Columbus, Montana the:

ROBERT E. EWING MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

Whereas, the National Interstate Highway System is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2006, and

Whereas, the completion of the Interstate Highway system has been recognized as a significant achievement from a construction and engineering standpoint, and

Whereas, the nation including the State of Montana have benefited greatly by the completion of the Interstate system within the State of Montana, and

Whereas, the successful completion of the Interstate Highway system in Montana was only accomplished through the energy, spirit, leadership and commitment of the employees Department of Transportation and,

Whereas, ROBERT E. EWING was employed by the Department of highways in a career spanning over fifty years from 1947 to 1997 and during his career starting as a temporary worker and eventually, through diligence and effort, rising to the level of Chainman, Rodman, Resident engineer, Project Manager and ending his career as a Construction Reviewer, and

Whereas, during his career his efforts were recognized by twice receiving awards for his work as Project Manger on the construction of I-90 from Park City to Columbus as well as Project Manager of the construction of I-94 from Huntley to Ballantine, and

Whereas, during his career Robert and his wife Mildred raised their family, and to accomplish his work, moved their residence 39 times, and

Whereas, the Montana Transportation Commission wishes to honor the commitment and accomplishments of a dedicated public servant whose work was instrumental in helping Montana's Interstate Highway Construction program to a successful completion,

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE MONTANA
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION HEREBY DESIGNATES THAT PORTION OF
INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 90 FROM PARK CITY TO COLUMBUS, MONTANA:**

THE ROBERT E. EWING MEMORIAL HIGHWAY, AND FURTHER

Direct the Department of Transportation to erect appropriate signs identifying the Robert E. Ewing Memorial Highway

Dated in Regular Session this 14th day of July, 2006

State of Montana Transportation Commission

Bill Kennedy, Chairman, District 5

Nancy Espy, District 4

Kevin Howlett, District 1

Rick Griffith, District 2

Deb Kottel, District 3

Attest:

Lori K. Ryan, Commission Secretary

